

July 21, 1992

Dear Friends,

People seem intrigued with the name False Memory Syndrome Foundation. We get all sorts of questions about it. Last week when we took some packets to the Post Office, a clerk asked, "What do you do to belong to your club? Forget things? I'm always forgetting things."

"Why yes," I replied, "it is about remembering and forgetting."

There has been no summer lull in the FMS Foundation office. Indeed, the pace of the phone calls keeps increasing as does our understanding of the scope and the nature of the phenomenon of the incest recovery movement. A year ago we knew no other family in this situation. Today we know more than 650 families with remarkably similar stories.

One year ago, there seemed a veritable wall against even mentioning the possibility of error in an accusation of sexual abuse based on the recovery of a repressed memory during therapy. This year there have been articles in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Toronto Star*, *Miami Herald*, *Utah County Journal*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Kansas City Star* and many other papers that discussed these issues. An article about false memory syndrome is soon to appear in the Science Section of the *New York Times*. False memory syndrome is now a subject that can be discussed and examined.

Just a few months ago, families were reluctant to be interviewed. Last week several families appeared on WWOR news which was carried on cable stations across the nation. On the date of this newsletter, other families are appearing on the *Sally Jessie Raphael* show. When the *Kansas City Star* carried a front page story about a daughter who publicly accused her prominent 73-year old father (in a very well-advertised presentation), he just as publicly denied the allegations (in a forty-minute televised news conference). He took the occasion to demand an accounting from the community organization that sponsored the presentation of her accusations.

Together we have made a start in getting some people to question their assumptions about the accuracy of long-repressed memories. Just because a person recovers vivid memories of abuse by space aliens does not mean that space aliens have invaded our planet. Just because someone recovers vivid memories of past lives does not establish the reality of such lives. Just because someone recovers memories of abuse during some sort of therapy does

not mean that it really happened. There are explanations for why people have very clear memories of things they may never have experienced. Memories are not stored like pictures from a camera or like data in a computer. Human memory is a creative process and memories are reconstructed and reinterpreted.

There is a vast amount to do to inform people about the nature of memory. We are pleased to be able to tell you that we have received funding to hold a national conference at which important issues of repressed memory can be discussed by memory-researchers representing a variety of perspectives. We hope that such a conference will help clarify and focus attention on the horrendous situation in which we find ourselves. We are rushing to plan this for the late fall for we understand the desperate pressure of time only too well.

Pamela

### Who calls the Foundation?

The office phone rarely stops ringing. We currently have two phones. The 800 number is set up to take a message when the phone is in use. The other number will give a busy signal if we are talking on the phone. We get an amazing variety of calls.

**Accusers:** We have started to receive calls from people who question the motivations of the FMS Foundation. We have been told that we are supporting "perps" (perpetrators), and that because of our organization, women will be afraid to come forward with their stories of abuse. We reply that we are documenting stories that people tell us, that we have no way of verifying the stories, that people found guilty of abuse should be held accountable for their actions, but that the huge number of stories and the patterns that they show are indeed raising questions in the minds of many people. We note that in the stories we have been told, people entered therapy for a variety of reasons that did not include "incest." There is no reason why our organization would prevent people from continuing to do that.

We remind the caller that we have accused no one of anything and that it is our understanding that in the United States and Canada, people who are accused have a right to tell their side of a story. We are recording the stories of parents and grandparents and sisters and brothers, not "perps." We ask if there is not great prejudice in their use of a term like "perp." It is not for us to judge the stories but to keep an open mind and provide a forum for the fact that there are two sides to the stories which hinge on the

accuracy of memories and the notion of "repression." We record and document stories of survivors when they call.

We have begun to get a trickle of calls from people who are accusers but who are questioning their own therapy. In the past month we have talked with several more women who have reconsidered their memories and who have the courage and integrity to say that maybe they were not accurate memories. These women have told us of tremendous pressure they felt in therapy or therapy groups to get memories.

*"I thought I was being brave. I thought I was saving my family. I thought if I didn't remember, I had a big chance of hurting my own children. I lived in fear of what I might do if I didn't remember. I was afraid because I didn't have any memories."*

Our hearts broke this week as we listened to a woman weeping that she had killed her father with her accusations. We knew the gentle and highly respected man who was her father. He told us that no one else in the family believed his daughter whom he so loved and worried about and whom he described as loving and kind before she went into therapy. After several years of no contact, he finally had reason to think that his daughter had begun to question her quite improbable memories of abuse: she had left a phone message asking for recommendations of different therapists to consult. He died before they had a chance to talk.

We welcome this daughter, with love and compassion. We will never speak of her memories unless it is important to her. We have worried from the beginning about the terrible burdens that will confront children when they come back from their false memories. In the mission statement of the Foundation the accused are called the *secondary* victims of FMS. It is those with the false memories who are the *primary* victims. They must live with the consequences of their actions for the rest of their lives.

It speaks of an illness in the mental health community that we could even write this story. Although we have been told of at least a half dozen fathers who died soon after the accusations, this is the first time we have encountered something quite like this when the victim was coming back from the false memories. It is truly heartbreaking.

**Families:** We continue to document stories of families that are devastated by accusations of incest and abuse by an adult child who has recovered "memories" during some sort of therapy. Over and

over callers tell us that the accuser has cut off contact and that other sisters, brothers and family members have no such horrible memories. They tell us that the therapists and the accusing child have told them they are "in denial," but callers insist that the abuse simply could not have happened. *"This is a hit and run attack," one parent exclaimed. "This is not acceptable!"*

Information about lawsuits brought by accusing children against parents is mounting. We are working on a separate study of these cases. With the collaboration of families who are sharing their experiences, we expect to have a story to tell soon. In addition, we are preparing a special packet for lawyers and families involved in legal actions which should be available by the end of summer.

We receive many calls from desperate parents whose children have been taken away from them and put in foster care because of an accusation of abuse by someone. We also get calls from parents who tell us that accusations have come as a result of divorce proceedings. Although we document these calls, we do not include them in our count of stories of adult children who make accusations based on the claim of recovery "repressed memories" of long-past childhood abuse. We refer these people to other organizations equipped to help them. The San Diego Grand Jury has investigated these types of accusations, and it has published several reports this year which we urge every person to order. The reports are important not only because of the system-abuse that is exposed but also because it helps to place "repressed memories of abuse" in a broader context. (Call 619-236-2675 and ask for reports # 6 and # 8.)

**Professionals:** Approximately 40% of our calls now are from professionals requesting information: lawyers, doctors, mental health workers who tell us they question what is going on in their own professions. This past week we received calls from administrators at two universities who asked for information because they want to examine the counseling services that are offered to their students. We received a call from a "think tank" that advises insurance companies. We have received inquiries from the Federal Trade Commission and many state regulatory and law enforcement agencies. We send whatever we have learned.

We get calls from reporters just about every day. Some of these are in response to our press release or to your letters to the media. Some have heard about us in other ways. There are reporters across the nation currently working on stories for papers and magazines. Television producers also call for information. As families are willing to appear, television

coverage will follow. It is more difficult to help producers as we try to match our goal of informing the public about the nature of memory while providing dignity and anonymity for people who have had their lives torn apart with the media's craving for human drama. We do our best.

There is nothing boring or routine about the phone calls to the FMS Foundation office.

### Repressed Memories

Some of our members have written that there is no such thing as repressed memories. Unfortunately, the issue is not that simple. There are some notions related to repression that are agreed upon and there are others that are not. For most of us repression is terribly confusing.

The theory of repression is one that has been fundamental to the clinical practice of psychiatry. Clinicians do see patients who recover memories. Once a patient recovers a memory, he or she believes it. There are tremendous numbers of reports of recovered memories but little is known about whether the self-reported memories are accurate.

People observe things but often the scientific principle that accounts for the observation is obscured or even counter to the observation. Standing on Earth, the Sun is seen to move about the Earth. There is no question that that is what one sees. In the last few hundred years we have accepted a counter-intuitive interpretation of the clear evidence of our eyes. Our experiences with earth-bound bodies do not prepare us for the mechanics of the solar system but we have learned that the apparent motion of the sun is, in fact, caused by motion of the earth. Likewise what clinicians see in their work with people who recover memories is certainly real but it does not account for the memories themselves.

The mental processes or the mechanisms of how a theory of repression might work in the brain are far from clear and have been and remain a subject of current interest and laboratory research. There is general agreement that people do reject information from awareness on a selective basis and that people tend to avoid painful situations. There is also agreement that some mental activities proceed without conscious awareness. Our minds, for example, perform many functions automatically such as regulating our breathing or interpreting sound patterns into *meaningful* language. What is not agreed upon is how "smart" this level of mental functioning actually is. The June, 1992 issue of the *American Psychologist*, for example, has several articles on this issue. The general feeling at this time is that there is no experimental evidence of very "smart" unconscious processes.

We have been asked to believe that the recovered memories of abuse were repressed as a defense against the trauma of the horror and betrayal in the abuse situation. We have been told that because the abuser was more powerful and a person of trust, the child had to repress the memories to accommodate to the situation—to survive. We ask in return why we have never heard stories of repressed memories from survivors of the Holocaust? This is an acknowledged historical event of almost unequalled horror that included rapes and torture. Why no stories of repressed memories?

We also ask how we should account for the fact that people have recovered repressed memories of their trip through the birth canal, abuse by space aliens, satanic ritual murders, and past lives. We feel that these are fair questions to ask. They are all reported in the literature and any theory of repression must account for them.

### Common Sense and Statistics of Sexual Abuse

We suspect that much fuel for the belief in the memories comes from the conflicting and possibly inflated statistics about the actual incidence of child sexual abuse. Hunches are reported as data. Retrospective survey data are reported without being labeled as such.

The past decade was a period during which a national priority was implemented which dramatically increased the training and the number of people with mandates to deal with child abuse. Simultaneously, legal obligations fell to gate keepers (e.g., medical professionals, educators, etc) to report any suspicions that they had on the abuse of children. If those reports were ever proved to be unfounded there would be no liability to the reporters. However, if they failed to report, they potentially faced legal repercussions. It seems reasonable to conclude that data collected during that period should be reflective of the situation. How are we to make sense of the data that we have?

The National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse reports that somewhere between 6% and 62% of women are molested before the age of 18. They report that the molest rate of 1 out of 4 has become accepted simply from being repeated so often. A range between 6% and 62% tells us that we do not have any reliable information on the problem. (National Committee - add address)

The Department of Health and Human Services Technical Amendment to the Study..... ( ) seems to show that the correct estimate for sexual abuse is 1.9 children per 1,000 children in the population using the harm standard, and 2.1 children per 1,000 chil-

dren in the population using the endangerment standard found on pages 3 and 5, i.e., 2 tenths of one percent of the population experiencing sexual abuse per the 1980 definitions.

A study released this year by the national Victim Center, Rape in America, has data collected by telephone interview that indicate that 1 out of 8 women are raped during their lifetime. This study uses strict definitions of rape.

The most frequently cited figure is 1 out of 4 women molested before the age of 18 but we have recently seen 1 out of 3 and even 1 out of 2 stated. Some of the discrepancy has to do with the different ways that abuse and incest are defined. For example, in *Courage to Heal*, the reader is told that she has been sexually violated if "You had the feeling your stepfather was aware of your physical presence every minute of the day, no matter how quiet and unobtrusive you were." (p. 22). Accusations of incest now include emotional incest which we have seen defined to include such events as any role reversal that might have taken place in a family when a child took care of a sick parent.

Common sense tells us that there is something radically wrong with the statistics on sexual abuse that are reported with such assurance by the media. The discrepancies just do not make any sense—even considering differences in definitions. How can a reasonable person reconcile rates of 2% with 25% or 50% or 62%. It doesn't make sense. We do not question the fact that the statistics on child sexual abuse were seriously under-reported in the past. They were. Given the mandates of the last decade, however, it is difficult to believe that data collected in a systematic and controlled manner by professionals working with children should not be the more reliable data to consider when reporting child abuse data. For the past decade everything has been stacked in favor or over-reporting as a way of overlooking nothing. While still unacceptably high, the data of the Department of Health and Human Services is in the single digit range.

We ask that professionals with skills in these matters address this matter. Irresponsible reporting of inflated rates of sexual abuse contribute only to hysteria, not to addressing the problems.

### Survey

We will include survey forms in the August mailing to those who have not yet received them. We apologize for mentioning the survey and then not sending it. Please understand that in our wildest dreams, we simply had no idea that so many families would contact us in such a short time.

We report this month on some information about the children with false memory syndrome.

### Do Children with False Memories Live Far from Parents?

We wondered if it might be easier to maintain the beliefs if distance was involved. This appears not to be a factor. Looking at 120 surveys we found that

54 lived in the same state  
15 lived in a bordering state  
46 lived in a distant state  
5 did not answer the question

### Marital Status of Children with False Memories

There seems to be no pattern as to whether accusing children are single or married.

53 were married  
47 were single  
15 were divorced  
5 did not answer

### Do Children with False Memories have a History of Psychiatric or Psychological Treatment?

N 127

	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>NA</u>
childhood	14	101	12
adolescence	22	94	11
college	29	75	13
adult	82	25	20
any hospitalization experience, inclusive	31	78	17

Most of the children who recovered memories do not have any history of psychological or psychiatric treatment before going to a therapist as an adult.

### Were there any stressful situations within the last two or three years for the person with false memories?

N = 134 This was an open ended question and responses were coded in the following categories:

physical illness	12
emotional illness	14
significant relations	42
job/school stress	25
serious trauma	19
financial problems	9
pregnancy & birth	1
weight problem	7
job loss	4
drugs	4
change (moving)	9
none	13
not known	14

We might infer that these are the reasons that the children sought therapy as adults keeping in mind that this information is as reported by parents.

### What methods of discipline were used as child was growing?

method	as a child	as a teen
spanking	55	4
talking	48	40
yelling	10	3
send to room	41	2
deny privileges	42	38
grounding	11	37
none	4	10
NA	10	18

Were their periods in which one parent assumed greater responsibility for discipline in the family?

yes = 78      no = 44      NA = 10

If "yes" which parent?

mother = 55      father = 21      NA = 56

We assume that methods of discipline were the same for siblings who did not get the memories.

### Number of Children in Accused Families

# in family	#in survey
1	3
2	28
3	39
4	22
5	14
6	10
7	6
8	0
9	1

Did both parents work outside the home during period of alleged abuse?

yes = 35      no = 94      NA = 2

Were there other people in the home as the accusing child was growing up? (i.e. grandparents, nanny, etc)

yes = 46      no = 85      NA = 1

Were other adults in close contact with the accusing child while living at home? (i.e., friends, relatives)

yes = 71      no = 57      NA = 4

The children with the false memories are probably in the last generation to have a family situation in which the mother was at home. In more than a third of the families

there were other people living in the home and in half of the families other adults were in close contact with the children and who might observe unusual behavior on the part of the children.

### Age of accuser at time of initial allegations

N = 131 Female = 117, Male = 14

age	#
15-19	6
20-24	14
25-29	26
30-34	31
35-39	29
40-44	16
45-49	3
50-54	1
NA	5

### Alleged abuse - starting age of child

age	#
below 2 yr	18
2	21
3	15
4	11
5	13
6	8
7	5
8	3
9	2
10	2
13	3
14	1
NA	30 (vague accusations)

How long were the memories repressed? (from age alleged abuse supposedly began to age at which memory recovered)

years	#
10-14	7
15-19	11
20-24	14
25-29	19
30-34	30
35-39	11
40-44	7
45-49	1
NA	26 (accusations too vague to tell)

For Help Call 1-800-568-8882

## MEETINGS

Families have been meeting in formal and informal settings across the United States and Canada. If you have not yet been in contact with anyone from your state and you wish to do so, let us know.

At meetings, people naturally share what they have learned. For example, families are learning about licensing regulations for mental health professionals in their states and legislative actions that may affect them. Members discuss strategies for informing influential people in government, law, education, medicine and the media about the problem.

At each of the recent meetings in Salt Lake City and Oklahoma City, young women appeared and asked to have time to tell of their own experiences with memories recovered in therapy which they now believe were false. This is extremely helpful to parents in getting an understanding of what has happened in their own families.

### ARIZONA

Call Jim at 602-860-8981

### TORONTO, CANADA

Saturday, August 30, 1992

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The August newsletter will be brief because we will be on holiday for part of the month. The August mailing will, however, include several papers that have recently appeared and survey forms for families that have not received them.

### WHERE DO 649 FAMILIES LIVE?

AK (1)	AR (1)	AZ (34)	CA (60)	CO (5)
CT (2)	DE (1)	FL (10)	GA (4)	HI (1)
LA (2)	ID (5)	IL (14)	IN (9)	KS (14)
LA (4)	MA (10)	MD (7)	MI (20)	MN (8)
MO (8)	MS (1)	MT (2)	NC (5)	NH (1)
NJ (25)	NM (2)	NV (5)	NY (24)	OH (34)
OK (8)	OR (7)	PA (99)	RI (1)	SC (2)
TN (1)	TX (13)	UT (52)	VA (8)	VT (1)
WA (19)	WI (22)	DC (1)	Canada -	BC (6)
MB (1)	NS (1)	ON (84)	PQ (2)	SK (1)
ABROAD (1)				

The July and August mailings are being sent by bulk mail. Please check the date of the newsletter with the date that you receive it and let us know if this cost-saving method is satisfactory. Time is precious to us.

### Recommended Readings

*Freudian Fraud: The Malignant Effect of Freud's Theory on American Thought and Culture*, 1992  
by E. Fuller Torrey, M.D.  
Harper Collins

We repeat some past recommendations.  
*Hidden Memories*, 1992  
by Robert Baker

### Prometheus Books

Parents tell us that this is the best book they have read to understand some of the issues of how their children could have gotten such terrible memories.

### *Courage to Heal*, 1988

Bass and Davis  
Harper and Row

Parents do not like this book which is known as the bible of the incest recovery movement, but they say that it helps to explain the strange and cruel behavior of their children. Many parents received letters copied from this book.

### A question of ethics

Many parents have asked about the ethical behavior of therapists who give their clients a book such as *Courage to Heal*. It appears that the therapist who makes a diagnosis of incest then proceeds to tell the client that a lawsuit is part of the recovery process to get money for continued therapy and then gives the client a list of lawyers who take such cases. People with this question may write to the  
Ethics Committee  
American Psychological Association

Washington, DC